“AI doomer” is a label for someone who is concerned about AI-caused extinction (or comparable AI catastrophes) — often used pejoratively, by people who take a dim view of such concerns.

It’s worth distinguishing a few kinds of views that might cause someone to be called an “AI doomer”:

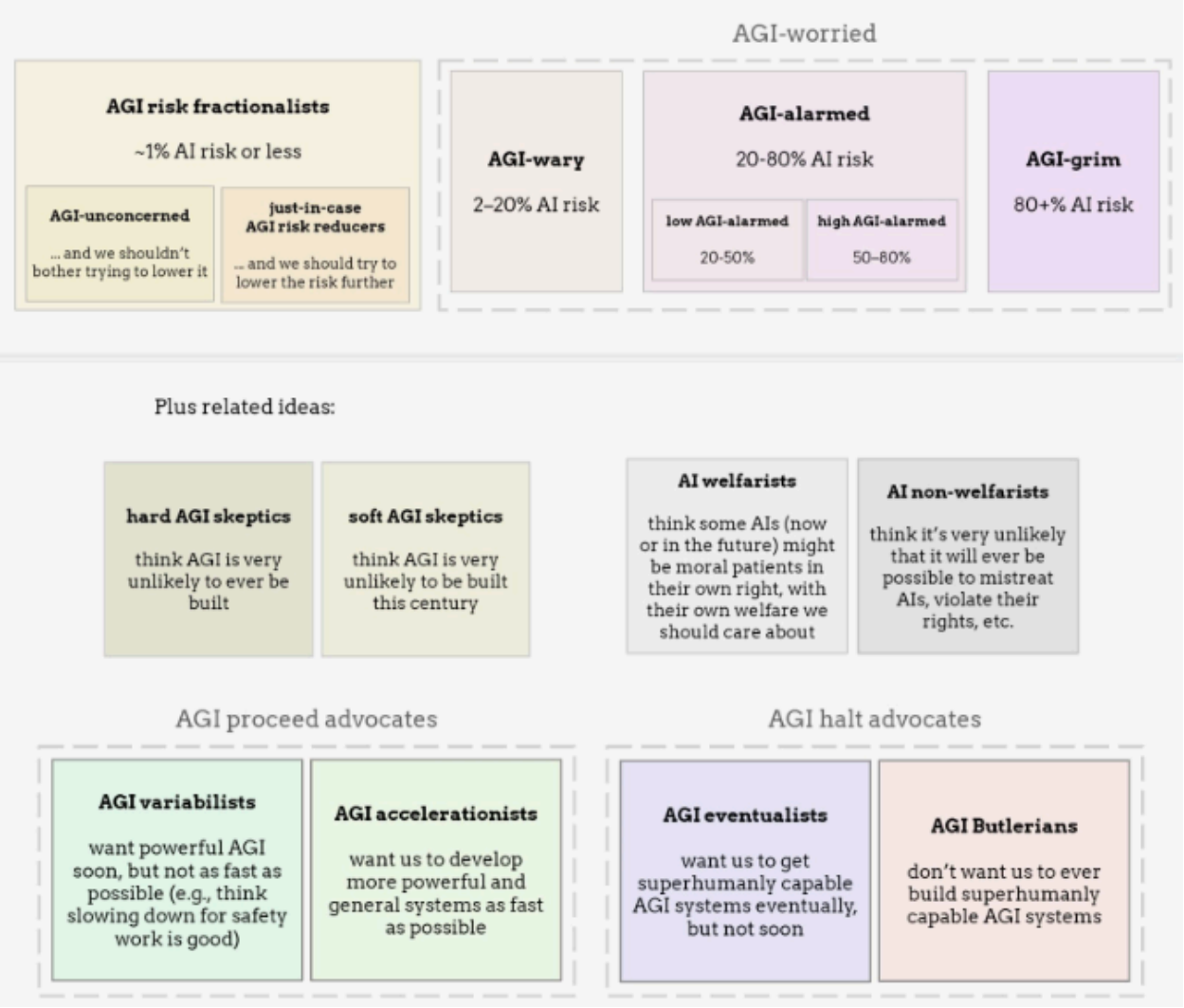
1. “AI-caused extinction is **plausible** enough to pay attention to and to make tradeoffs to prevent.” This view is held by many AI researchers, engineers, policy analysts, safety researchers, and heads of AI labs, as illustrated by the CAIS statement on AI risk.
2. “AI-caused extinction is highly **probable**.” People with this view generally think that although we will probably fail to avoid extinction, it’s worth trying. This includes Eliezer Yudkowsky and others at MIRI.
3. “AI-caused extinction is **inevitable** and not even worth trying to prevent.” This sense of “doomer” is often used in other contexts, like climate change, but it’s uncommon for people to be fatalistic about AI risk in this way.

Outside the context of existential risk, the term is occasionally applied to ideas as varied as “AI will doom artists to unemployment” and even “AI is doomed to stay at a low capability level.” And outside the context of AI, “doomer” can refer to anyone who is pessimistic about technological progress (like a Luddite), or the future in general. This results in further confusion because many “AI doomers” are optimistic about progress, but carve out an exception for AI.

Fixing the Ambiguity

While there are no alternatives to “AI doomer” that have gained traction, one attempt at better-defined terms comes from Rob Bensinger:

- “AGI risk fractionalists”: p(doom) < 2%
- “AGI-wary”: p(doom) around 2-20%
- “AGI-alarmed”: p(doom) around 20-80%
- “AGI-grim”: p(doom) > 80%



Bensinger also suggests terms like “AGI variabilists” and “AGI eventualists” for different preferred policies about whether and when to build AGI. The policy question is partly separate from that of how likely AI is to cause extinction, but the term “doomer” tends to conflate them.

Further reading:

- Some reasons not to say “Doomer” by Ruby
- Ajeya Cotra, Shane Legg and others discussing the relevance of the term

Alternative phrasings

- What is “AI doomerism”?

Related

- What is "p(doom)"?
- How likely is extinction from superintelligent AI?

Scratchpad

See also How likely is extinction from superintelligent AI?

alternative bullet draft (or maybe just some points to be integrated)

- it's an ambiguous and often pejorative term for people who worry about existential risk ("doom") from AI, sometimes also called ["safetyists", "x-risk advocates", …]
- in some other contexts, e.g. climate, "doomer" is used by people who stress that there's a problem but that it's worth solving, to refer to people who focus on it being catastrophic regardless of what we do; but this is mostly not how it's used in the AI context, so beware of confusion here
    - the word "doom" itself is somewhat ambiguous in that it can sometimes just mean "ruin" / "permanent bad event" / "extinction", but it can also imply inevitability; "p(doom)" [afaik] always means "probability of extinction" and not "probability that extinction is inevitable"
- in the AI x-risk context, "doomer" is often used to refer to anyone who thinks doom is plausible enough to be worth worrying a lot about, e.g. Hinton and Bengio get called "doomers" though their probability of x-risk is [look up] 10% or so
- an intermediate meaning is that a "doomer" is someone who thinks doom will probably happen but thinks it's not certain and worth trying to avoid even though we'll probably fail; Eliezer Yudkowsky and MIRI are the most prominent examples

general vague definition: "people sometimes use the word doomer to refer, mostly pejoratively, to those who believe AI poses an existential risk"

- "doomer" sense 1: someone who thinks it's plausible enough to pay attention to and make tradeoffs for (e.g. everyone who signed the CAIS letter)
- "doomer" sense 2: someone who thinks it's highly probable (e.g. MIRI)
- "doomer" sense 3: someone who thinks it's inevitable (not used much in AI risk discourse, but worth calling out as a possible misinterpretation because it's common in e.g. climate discourse https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2024/04/forget-doomers-warming-can-be-stopped-top-climate-scientist-says/ https://www.worldwildlife.org/stories/what-you-need-to-know-about-climate-doomers)